

Angela Svenšek
Beltinci Primary School
Slovenia

UDK-371.5
Стручни рад
НВ. LVIII 4. 2009.
Примљен: 3. VI 2009.

TOWARDS HIGHER DISCIPLINE IN BELTINCI PRIMARY SCHOOL

Abstract *The aim of the article is to present the implementation of the project "Network of learning schools" (NLS) in the Beltinci Primary School. The implementation resulted in considerable improvement of the students' discipline. The Head-teacher Training School in Kranj (HTTS) (Sola za ravnateljce Kranj) have organized the implementation of the project in more than 200 kindergartens and primary and secondary schools in Slovenia since 2005. All employees in the selected schools and kindergartens are included in the educational training within the project. The findings show that the climate, as well as communication, within and among schools, has improved considerably. Our school joined the project in 2006/07 academic year. The evaluation of the part of the project at the Beltinci Primary School confirms the findings mentioned above.*

Key words: *in-service teacher training, discipline, communication, organizational learning, collaborative work.*

ПУТ КА ВЕЋОЈ ДИСЦИПЛИНИ УЧЕНИКА У ОСНОВНОЈ ШКОЛИ БЕЛТИНЦИ

Апстракт *Циљ овог рада јесте да прикаже имплементацију пројекта "Мрежа школа које уче" у Основној школи у Белтинцима. Од увођења овог пројекта дошло је до значајног побољшања дисциплине ученика. Почев од 2005. године Школа за школске управитеље у Крању организовала је увођење овог програма у преко 200 вртића и основних и средњих школа у Словенији. Обука у оквиру пројекта обухвата све запослене у одабраним школама и вртићима. Резултати показују да су се клима, као и комуникација, унутар школе и међу школама значајно поправиле од увођења програма. Наша школа укључена је у пројекат 2006/07 школске године. Евалуација дела програма који се односи на Основну школу Белтинци потврђује горе поменуте налазе.*

Кључне речи: *усавршавање наставника, дисциплина, комуникација, организационо учење, колаборативни рад (сарадња).*

К ПРОБЛЕМЕ ПОВЫШЕНИЯ ДИСЦИПЛИНЫ УЧЕНИКОВ ОСНОВНОЙ ШКОЛЫ (ВПЕЧАТЛЕНИЯ О ПРОЕКТЕ)

Резюме *Цель данной работы заключается в анализе имплементации проекта Сеть обучающих школ в основной школе Белтинци. С самого начала применения этого проекта наблюдается значительное улучшение дисциплины учеников. Начиная с 2005 года, в организации Школы для заведующих в городе Крањ, данная программа введена в более 200 детских садов и основных школ в Словении. Подготовка в рамках данного проекта охватывает всех работающих*

Towards higher discipline in beltinci primary school

в этих школах и детских садах. Результаты показывают что коммуникация внутри одной школы и между школами значительно улучшилась с момента введения программы. Наша школа была включена весной 2006/07 учебного года. Эвальвацией части программы, проведенной в основной школе Белтинци подтвердились упомянутые результаты.

Ключевые слова: *усовершенствование преподавателей, дисциплина, коммуникация, организационное обучение, сотрудничество.*

Introduction

As of lately we have been confronted with both global and local changes which affect educational environment, too. The role of the family has changed and so have social values. Hargreaves (1994) emphasizes that we can speak of “the end of certainty”, which he describes as the period in which the world around us is constantly changing and, consequently, our concepts of knowledge and learning change, too. We have to focus on information gathering, research and analyses and be prepared to judge the environment around us critically. Instead of lingering on the concept “teacher = waiter” (bearer of knowledge), in school we should try to create opportunities for exchange of experiences in order to analyze complex situations within the network of colleagues by sharing expert knowledge and developing mutual self-respect. Various social organizations, schools included, are moving towards learning organizations, the trend being in tune with the strategy for improvements and faster general development of our society. Modern literature evidently shows an expanded focus and interest for education, especially organizational learning which is viewed from different perspectives. For instance, Dimovski (1999) mentions four perspectives (informational, interpretative, strategic and behavioural) and focuses on the behavioural one in which learning is seen as a continuous individual and organizational process. Reeves and Boreham (2006) believe that organizational learning in schools can be best explained in the context of socio-cultural theories of learning, where learning is perceived as a form of participation.

The professionals of the future will be required to show:

- the ability to make objective judgments,
- respect for moral and emotional sides of educational work,
- common problem solving skills,
- aspiration for constant professional and personal development, and
- readiness for “opening outwards” (Dimmock, 2000).

One step towards organizational learning has been initiated by the educational project “Networks of Learning Schools” (NLS) organized by the HTTS Kranj (Šola za ravnateljce). The NLS has been devised to cater appropriately for the teachers’ assemblies regarding the development of the teachers’ attitudes towards the basic school-mission-change and orientation towards the individual learner. Defining the mission of an organization helps to look on organisations from a strategic point of view. Schools often share narrow views that all their problems are connected with learning and teaching pupils. Yet, the term education refers also to the process of training professional teams in situations when some improvements are planned and introduced in schools. Thus school becomes both learning and developmental organisation, and current priority tasks require the professionals trained for the collaborative way of work. The school tries to solve the problems of the field of improvements on the basis “actions – improvement” principle.

In the NLS the teachers become familiar with their basic mission, reestablish mutual collaboration, assume responsibility for their own ideas and actions and come to decisions through teamwork. The project offers different routes to decision making since the schools participating in the project have to address different problems of different fields, for example: discipline, students’ learning habits, homework assignments, organisational atmosphere, social relationships and communication, and school environment arrangements.

The members of each team trained in the NLS become qualified for introducing the recommended changes and processes into school environment and they are crucial mediators of knowledge absorbed at workshops. They apply the knowledge acquired during their training into practice by teaching their co-workers. An important factor for introducing changes is also the support and help of the school management.

The educational process does not rely on a unique or single event, but on a sequence of different activities which are organized within an academic year. It requires and encourages collaboration and learning by all teachers within a school, as well as frequent exchanges of good practices and experiences among schools striving to solve different problems they all share.

At this point it is important to mention that the success of the NLS and the quality of teamwork depends on the selection of team members, the relationships within a team, as well as on various psychological factors such as personal dedication and a sense for team-play, etc. Personal attributes/characteristics of the team members may have a great impact on the development of trust and atmosphere in the team, as well as positive or negative individual expectations and concrete experiences with teamwork, and different strategy preferences for solving problems and conflicts in the team.

Implementation of the project

In the 2006/2007 academic year, the Primary School Beltinci (650 pupils and 72 employees) decided to take part in the project Networks I. Four teachers, myself included, from our school were delegated.

The **first work-shop** was organized in collaboration of our school management in October 2006. The topic was “*Goals, vision and mission of the school*”. We were first informed about a seminar titled: “On the way towards learning organization”, in which the emphasis was on the participants in education and their interests.

Then we learned that three most important factors are responsible for school progress and catering for the school’s interests:

a) *leadership or management* (e.g. is interested in the school’s progress and wishes it to become or remain eminent and reputable; its pupils and professionals (teachers) to be successful, willing to accept new challenges while working in a stimulating and creative climate/atmosphere),

b) *teachers* (e.g. our interest is undoubtedly good working climate/atmosphere; we need the support of our management, adequate work conditions; we wish to attain good results, to teach motivated and successful pupils, and to achieve efficient collaboration with their parents), and

c) *the local community* (e.g. connection with village/town, good, successful and respected school, the centre of the community life).

Then followed a brainstorming session in which the teachers were divided into nine groups. We started the group work with a short motivational game, in which each teacher was asked to first take a piece of cut postcards and then go around and find the group with the same motif.

After that each group were searching for a “vision” for our school. The “vision” was supposed to be simple, should make sense, and should be stimulating and challenging. Together with other teachers in our team we construed our “vision”: *To create an internationally well-known, pleasant, and successful school - for life*. Our “school development team” was well prepared. Each member had a chance to resume the leadership role during the workshop because it was planned and conducted logically and efficiently.

All participants were active and highly motivated for work. The atmosphere was relaxed, our work was efficient, and the teachers were more than willing to offer their ideas for the “vision”. At the end we were asked to evaluate the workshop, and we unanimously expressed our satisfaction by assessing the workshop with the top grade on the scale from 1 to 5.

The second workshop title was “**Definition of preferential tasks of the school and determination of field of improvements**”. This one took place by the

end of October 2006. At the beginning the instructors surprised the teachers with small gifts which served as the criterion for arranging them in groups.

We defined major school activities, selected the most important ones and selected the field needing improvements. As expected, lessons, and education of children and teachers were stated as the most important activities and the field of improvements was defined by the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). Based on its results, we chose the discipline that needed more improvements than other fields. Teachers readily agreed that students' behaviour and the atmosphere in schools had changed much in the previous decade. They noticed a considerable increase of impatience, egoism, intolerance and chattiness among students and concluded that class discipline was the biggest problem in all schools. This workshop was also very successful and deserved the highest grades.

The third workshop was delivered at the beginning of March in 2007. This time we made an Action-Improvement plan and its implementation in school. It was decided that teachers should work in groups in order to ensure better monitoring of the performed activities. The next step was to analyze the observational data. In the analysis of the causes and consequences of the problems, we eliminated all factors we generally have no influence on. The field of discipline was examined closely, we analysed the activities which had already been implemented in our school, our values and principles in relation to discipline, our practical work, rules and procedures.

At the work shop teachers tailored their action plans. They set themselves the tasks:

- to keep up their personal and professional dignity by not allowing themselves to use bad language or mean words, or insult and deride students,
- to ensure a constant and high level of security of teachers and pupils,
- to see to it that pupils are in classrooms when the bell for the beginning of a lesson rings,
- to let pupils enter the gym only when permitted by the person in charge,
- to insist on punctuality among both parents and students regarding class attendance,
- to encourage students to take active part in class activities,
- to train school starters (1st year pupils) to use handkerchiefs properly and regularly, and dress properly for school, and
- to forbid chewing gums during the lessons.

Every action plan included and defined the tasks and the persons responsible for them, time for completing the tasks and the analysis of the work performed.

Overall, we can say that not only that the work shops themselves had positive effects on our work, but our working in teams had many positive effects, too. Thus the aims of the project were reached since the teachers had the opportunity:

- to reflect on and analyze their work,
- for constant learning and
- reaching higher effectiveness and efficiency, and
- for obtaining necessary support (smaller burden for the individual).

Findings

The reports on the improvements were collected in May 2007 (at the Teachers' Conference). The teachers had had to evaluate their action plans. Their analyses disclosed the changes and improvements in the selected discipline (field), especially in behaviour, order etc. Noticeable in the analyses is a higher degree of perceived discipline in comparison with the initial situation. The results of issued educational penalties (oral and written warnings) show that the number of these decreased from 42 to 27 in 2007/2008, i.e. 33 % less than in the previous academic year.

Collaboration among employees in the school became better, too. Most of the participants (95%) perceived workshops as positive and stressed they had enjoyed that type of training. After the workshops teachers started to talk more and associate more with each others. Good relationships have also bore fruits professionally, and the teachers estimate the willingness to collectively solve problems increased.

During the workshops, the majority of the team members were focused and attentive to achieve the final goal. On the other hand, these workshops were »open« enough for everyone to have enough independence in work while, at the same time, their work was stimulated by a number of methods for motivation enhancement.

Besides workshops being a good experience, helpful for work in school and for selection of common goals, the organisation and the way of delivery also has some influence on the work which should be mature and should be delivered in a serious way.

These projects can serve as an example how collaborative learning can be more successful than classical, individual learning in many aspects. Yet, if it is to be effective, certain conditions need to be fulfilled. These include the will and the agreement among the participants to learn together, to strive for the same goals and unselfishly share knowledge, ideas and experiences. It is very important to make them understand that all have equal rights on the knowledge provided by the project.

Finally, the participants, being the members of a team strengthened their knowledge further, and being the mediators who transmitted that knowledge to other teachers, elevated the levels of personal self-satisfaction and self-confidence.

As the Networks I proved to be very successful, according to excellent feedback regarding both the content and the quality of workshops delivery, our school decided to join the Project Network II, too. This time we selected the field of "Classroom Leadership".

As a general conclusion of our two-year experience with the NLS we can safely state that we are more successful in solving problems concerning discipline as well as in achieving higher educational outcomes in general.

Literature

- Dimovski, Vlado (1999): Organizacijsko učenje. Teorija in praksa, Vol. 36, n5, pp. 701-722.
- Priročnik za člane razvojnih timov (2006/07): S sodelovanjem do kakovosti. Šola za ravnatelje. Ljubljana.
- Pušnik, Mojca (2005): »Nasilje v šoli«, *Didakta*, Vol 15, n90/91, pp 3-5.
- Reeves, Jenny, Boreham, Nick (2006): »What's in a vision? Introducing an organisational learning strategy in a local authority's educational service«, *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 32, n4, pp. 467-486.
- Tavčar, Mitja, Trunk Širca, Nada (2002): *Na poti k učeči se organizaciji*. Ljubljana : Visoka šola za management v Kopru in Šola za ravnatelje.

Podaci o autoru:
Angela Svenšek
angela.svenssek@gmail.com
B.A. of Social Sciences
Education
Consulting
Beltinci Primary School